

Grade 8 - Narrative

Star of the Party

Standing on the porch at sunrise, Julie crossed her fingers and slowly turned in a circle. In the wide-open Sandhills country, there wasn't much to block her view. "Perfect—now STAY that way!" she whispered to the sky. "PLEASE."

Over night, a severe thunderstorm had pounded the Sandhills, drenching, but not discouraging, the campers at the annual Nebraska Star Party. Hundreds of astronomers were gathered at Merritt Reservoir, thirty miles north of Julie's family ranch. The Star Party was her favorite summer event, even though she often felt outclassed by the professional astronomers and sophisticated stargazers who came from as far away as Belgium and Brazil. By comparison, Julie felt like she was an unskilled amateur.

This year's party had been the best, Julie thought as she hurried to get ready. Except for last night, the weather had been excellent, the stars beautiful, and the conversations fascinating. Best of all, the Millennium Astronomy Club was arriving today with its 36-inch Dobsonian telescope, the largest ever at Merritt since the Star Party began in 1994.

Julie jumped when she heard a car drive into the yard. *That's Keith*, she thought, *he's right on time*. She walked to the front door just as her friend burst in. "Hey, slow down! What's the big rush," she asked.

"Bad news, Julie," Keith replied.

"The Millennium Club van went off Highway 97 in the storm! Nobody's hurt, but they're trapped between the North Loup and the Middle Loup. Both rivers are flooded and the

Highway Department says they can't get in there with a tow truck until the water recedes. It might be tomorrow before they can get in."

"What about the Dob?" Julie asked.

"It's OK, too," said Keith. "They've got cell phones, and somebody called Mr. Kirk up at Merritt to tell him what happened, but everybody there's really bummed."

"No kidding," said Julie. "Couldn't anybody think of anything to do?"

"Like what," said Keith, sitting down beside her, "grow wings?"

"Keith," Julie interrupted, jumping up suddenly. "Get back to Merritt as fast as you can."

"What for?" asked Keith, as Julie headed into the kitchen. "What are you gonna do?"

Pulling on heavy rubber boots, Julie hopped back into the living room. "Grow wings," Julie said.

"Huh?" said Keith.

"Just go," Julie said. "Tell everybody that the Dob will be there by tonight." She gave Keith a quick hug and raced out the door. Keith stood on the porch and watched Julie back her pickup from the shed.

Hours later at the Merritt observing field, Keith watched the highway anxiously. Behind him, groups of Star Partiers stood around their telescopes in the dusk. "What on Earth could she be thinking?" they had asked when he told them what Julie had said. Keith was beginning to agree with the others when a faint light appeared low in the southern sky, then two. They looked like evening stars on the horizon. Keith squinted and stared, as the lights grew brighter

and more distinct. "She's here! She made it!" he suddenly hollered as a pick-up pulling a horse trailer slowly turned into the campground drive.

Julie brought the truck to a halt, and two men and two women emerged from the trailer, covered in mud. They were laughing and talking all at once.

"How in the world..."sputtered Keith.

"Well," said Julie, "when you said 'grow wings,' I remembered an old dirt road that cuts across the Eagle Ranch south of Brownlee. I knew I could get across the river on the Highway 83 bridge, and then cross over to 97 on that old road."

"We couldn't believe it when we saw the truck bouncing over the hills," said one of the Millennium Club women. "It wasn't an eagle flying, but it sure looked great to us."

"What about the Dob?" Keith asked. He peered into the trailer. There, securely braced and padded, was the giant telescope.